

ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

Written on the MODEL of

The Ancient GREEK Tragedy.

By Mr. MASON.

EDINBURGH:

Printed for G. HAMILTON and J. BALFOUR.

M,DCC,LV.

Persons of the DRAMA.

Orgar, Earl of Devonshire.

Chorus, of British Virgins.

Elfrida, Daughter to *Orgar*,

Atbelwold, Husband to *Elfrida*.

Edwin, a Messenger.

Edgar, King of England.

Orgar disguis'd in a Peasant's Habit speaks the Prologue.

SCENE, a Lawn before *Atbelwold's* Castle in
Harewood Forest.



ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

ORGAR.

HOW nobly does this venerable wood,
Gilt with the glories of the orient sun,
Embosom yon fair mansion! The soft air
Salutes me with most cool and temp'rate breath;
And, as I tread, the flow'r-besprinkled lawn
Sends up a gale of fragrance. I should guess,
If e'er content deign'd visit mortal clime,
This was her place of dearest residence.
Grant heav'n! I find it such. 'Tis now three months,
Since first Earl *Athelwold* espous'd my daughter.
He then besought me, for some little space
The nuptials might be secret; many reasons,
He said, induc'd to this: I made no pause,
But, resting on his prudence, to his will
Gave absolute concurrence. Soon as married,
He to this secret seat convey'd *Elfrida*;
Convey'd her as by stealth, enjoy'd, and left her:
Yet not without I know not what excuse
Of call to court, of *Edgar's* royal friendship,
And *England's* welfare. To his Prince he went:
And since, as by intelligence I gather,
He oft returns to this his cloyster'd wife;
But ever with a privacy most studied.

His

His visits, as they're stol'n, are also short ;
 Seldom beyond the circuit of one sun :
 Then back to court, while she his absence mourns
 Full many a lonely hour. I brook not this.
 Had *Athelwold* espous'd some base-born peasant,
 This usage had been apt : but when he took
 My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin,
 Thro' whose rich veins the blood of ancient kings
 Ran in unsullied stream. Yes, her high lineage
 Would give her place and notice with the noblest
 In *Edgar's* court. *Elfrida's* beauty too
 (I speak not from a father's foolish fondness)
 Would shine amid the fairest, and reflect
 No vulgar glory on that Beauty's master.
 This act bespeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
 An em'erald, jasper, or rich chrysolite,
 Would hide its lustre ? he would bid it blaze
 Conspicuous on his brow. Haply *Athelwold*
 May have espous'd some other. 'Sdeath he durst not.
 My former feats in arms must have inform'd him,
 That *Orgar*, while he liv'd, would never prove
 A traitor to his honour. If he has——
 This aged arm is not so much unstrung
 By slack'ning years, but just revenge will brace it.
 And, by yon awful heav'n—But hold, my rage.
 I came to search into this matter coolly.
 Hence, to conceal the father and the Earl,
 This pilgrim's staff, and scrip, and all these marks
 Of vagrant poverty.

Cho. (within) Hail to thy living light, ambrosial morn !

All hail thy roseate ray !

Or. But hark, the sound of sweetest minstrelsy
 Breaks on my ear. The females, I suppose,
 Whom *Athelwold* has left my child's attendants :
 That, when she wails the absence of her Lord,
 Their lenient airs, and sprightly-fancied songs,
 May steal away her woes. See, they approach :

TH

I'll wait the cadence of their harmony,
And then address them with some feigned tale.

[*He retires.*]

O D E.

Cbo. Hail to thy living light,
Ambrosial morn ! all hail thy roseat ray :
That bids gay Nature all her charms display
In varied beauty bright ;
That bids each dewy-spangled flowret rise,
And dart around its vermeil dies ;
Bids silver lustre grace yon sparkling tide,
That winding warbles down the mountain's side.

Away, ye goblins all
Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt ;
Whose vagrant feet have trac'd your secret haunt
Beside some lonely wall,
Or shatter'd ruin of a moss-grown tow'r,
Where, at pale midnight's stillest hour,
Thro' each rough chink the solemn orb of night
Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.

Away, ye elves, away :
Shrink at ambrosial morning's living ray ;
That living ray, whose pow'r benign
Unfolds the scene of glory to our eye,
Where, thron'd in artless majesty,
The cherub Beauty sits on Nature's rustic shrine. —

CHORUS, ORGAR.

Cbo. Silence, my sisters. Whence this rudeness, Stranger,
That thus has prompted thine unbidden ear
To listen to our strains ?

Or. Your pardon, Virgins :

I mean not rudeness, tho' I dar'd to listen ;
For ah ; what ear so fortify'd and barr'd
Against the tuneful force of vocal charms,
But would with transport to such sweet assailants
Surrender its attention ? never yet

Have

Have I past by the night-bird's 'custom'd spray,
 What time she pours her wild and artless song,
 Without attentive pause and silent rapture ;
 How could I then, with savage disregard,
 Hear voices tun'd by nature sweet as hers,
 Grac'd with all art's addition ?

Cbo. Thy mean garb,
 And this thy courtly phrase but ill accord.
 Whence, and what art thou, Stranger ?

Or. Virgins, know
 These limbs have oft been rob'd in fairer vest :
 But what avails it now ? all have their fate ;
 And mine has been most wretched.

Cbo. May we ask
 What cruel cause——

Or. No ! Let this hapless breast
 Still hide the melancholy tale.

Cbo. We know,
 There oft is found an avarice in grief ;
 And the wan eye of sorrow loves to gaze
 Upon its secret hoard of treasure'd woes—
 In pining solitude. Perhaps thy mind
 Takes the same pensive cast : If not, indulge
 The tender temper of our virgin-souls,
 Which loves to melt in sympathizing tears
 And social sighs.

Or. Ah ! ill would it become ye,
 To let the woes of such a wretch as I am,
 E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

Cbo. The eye, that will not weep another's sorrow,
 Should boast no gentler brightness than the glare,
 That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.
 Let us entreat——

Or. Know, Virgins, I was born
 To ample property of lands and flocks,
 On this side *Tweed*'s stream. My youth and vigor
 Atchiev'd full many a feat of martial prowess :
 Nor was my skill in chivalry unnoted
 In the fair volume of my sov'reign's love ;

Who

Who ever held me in his best esteem,
 And closest to his person. When he paid,
 What all must pay, to fate ; and short-liv'd *Edwy*
 Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
 Fills (as loud fame reports) right royally ;
 I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
 Retir'd me with a set of chosen vassals,
 To my paternal seat. But ah ! not long
 Had I enjoy'd the sweets of that recess,
 Ere by the savage inroads of base hinds,
 That sallied frequent from the Scottish heights,
 My lands were all laid waste, my people murder'd ;
 And I, thro' impotence of age unfit
 To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
 My mis'ries thro' the land, a friendless wand'rer.

Gbo. We pity and condole thy wretched state,
 But we can do no more ; which, on thy part,
 Claims just returns of pity : for, whose lot
 Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
 To taste the joys of courteous charity ;
 To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
 Of palsy'd age ; to smooth its furrow'd brow,
 And pay its grey hairs each dew reverence ?
 Yet such delight we are forbid to taste ;
 For 'tis our Lord's command, that not a stranger,
 However high or lowly his degree,
 Have entrance at these gates.

Or. Who may this tyrant——

Gbo. Alas, no tyrant he ; the more our wonder
 At this harsh mandate : tenderness and pity
 Have made his breast their home. He is a man
 More apt, thro' inborn gentleness, to err,
 In giving mercy's tide too free a course,
 Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
 To circumscribe its channel. This his praise
 You'll hear the general theme in *Edgar's* court :
 For *Edgar* ranks him first in his high favour ;
 Loads him with honours, which the Earl receives,
 As does the golden censer frankincense,

Only

Only to spread a sacred gale of blessings
Thro' all the realm.

Or. Methinks, this pleasing portrait
Bears strong resemblance of Lord *Athelwold*.

Cho. Himself: no Briton but has heard his fame.

Or. 'Tis wondrous strange; can you conceive no cause
For this his conduct?

Cho. None, that we may trust.

Or. Your garbs bespeak you for the fair attendants
Of some illustrious dame, the wife, or sister
Of this dread Earl.

Cho. On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious silence:
Which strictly we obey; for well we know
Fidelity's the best and fairest wreath,
That can adorn a servant's brow. Farewel,
Depart with our best wishes; we do trespass
To hold such open converse with a stranger.

Or. Stay, Virgins, stay: have ye no friendly shed,
But bord'ring on your castle, where these limbs
Might lay their load of mis'ry for an hour?
Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
Wherewith I might support declining nature?
Ev'n while I speak, I feel my spirits fail;
And well, full well, I know, these trembling feet,
Ere I can pace a hundred steps, will sink
Beneath their wretched burthen.

Cho. Piteous sight!

What shall we do, my sisters? To admit
This man beneath the roof, would be to scorn
The Earl's strict interdict; and yet my heart
Bleeds to behold that white, old, rev'rend head
Bow'd with such misery.—Yes, we must aid him.
Hie thee, poor pilgrim, to yon neighbouring bow'r,
O'er which an old oak spreads his awful arm,
Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath
The ivy, gadding from th' untwisted stem,
Curtains each verdant side. There thou may'st rest,
There also find some dry'd, autumnal fruit,

Lodg'd

Lodg'd in the hollow of its aged trunk.
Much do we wish 'twere better fare.

Or. Kind heav'n !

Reward——

Cho. Nay ! stay not here to thank us,
But haste to give your age this poor assistance.
That done, we do conjure you leave the place
With cautious secrecy ; for, was it known,
That thus we trespass'd on our lord's command,
The consequence were fatal.

Or. Fairest maid !

Think not I'll basely draw down punishments
On my preservers. I withdraw. May blessings
Showr'd from yon fount of bliss repay your kindness.

[*Exit Orgar.*]

Semichor. Yes, sisters, yes, when pale distress
Implores your aiding hand,
Let not a partial faithfulness,
Let not a mortal's vain command
Urge you to break th'unalterable laws
Of heav'n-descended charity.
Ah ! follow still the soft-ey'd deity ;
For know, each path she draws,
Along the plain of life,
Meets at the central dome of social joy.
Follow the soft-ey'd deity ;
She bids ye, as ye hope for blessings, blefs.
Aid then the gen'ral cause of gen'ral happiness.

Semichor. Humanity ! thy awful strain
Shall ever meet our ear,
Sonorous, sweet, and clear.
And, as amid the sprightly swelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breathe
From flute or lyre,
The deep base rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir ;
So thou, humanity, shall lead along
Th' accordant passions in their moral song,
And give our mental concert truest harmony.

B

Cho.

Cho. But see, *Elfrida* comes.

Should we again resume our former strain,
And hail the morn that paints her waking beauties;
Or wait her gentle bidding? Rather wait;
For, as I think, she seems in musing mood:
And there are times, when to the pensive soul
The warbling voice of softest melody
Seems but discordant harshness.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Elf. O my Virgins,
With what a leaden and retarding weight,
Does expectation load the wing of time?
How have these three dull hours crept languid on,
Since first the crimson mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my friends,
Have I miscounted? did not *Athelwold*
At parting fix this morn for his return,
This dear long-wish'd for morn? He did, he did,
And seal'd it with a kiss; I could not err.
And yet he comes not. He was wont outstrip
The sun's most early speed, and make its rising
To me unwish'd and needless. This delay
Creates strange doubts and scruples in my breast.
Courts throng with Beauties, and my *Athelwold*
Has a soft, susceptible heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry sparkling eye,
As is the musk-rose to dispense its fragrance
To ev'ry whisp'ring breeze; perhaps he's false,
Perhaps *Elfrida's* wretched.

Cho. See, *Elfrida*,

Ah see! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Twines its green chain, and poisons what supports it.
Not less injurious to the blooming shoots
Of growing love is sickly jealousy.

Elf. My mind nor pines with sickly jealousy,
Nor triumphs in security and peace.
Who loves, must fear; and sure who loves like me,
Must greatly fear.

Cho.

Cho. Yet whence the cause? Your Earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with less ardent passion when he left you,
Than at the first bless'd meeting? No, I mark'd him,
His parting glance shot fervent, constant love,
And fealty unalter'd. Do not fear him.

Elf. I should not fear him, were his present stay
The only cause. Alas, it is not so!
Why comes my Earl so secret to these arms?
Why, but because he fears some other Fair
Should hear of his stol'n transports? Why am I
Here shrouded up, like the pale votarist,
Who knows no visitant, save the lone owl,
That leaves his ivy-crested battlement,
And sails on slow wing thro' the cloyster'd isles,
List'ning her faintly orisons. Why am I
Deny'd to follow my departing lord
Whene'er his duty calls him to the palace?

Cho. Covet not that: the noblest proof of love
That *Athelwold* can give, is still to guard
Your tender beauties from the blasting taint
Of courtly gales. The delicate soft tints
Of snowy innocence, the crimson glow
Of blushing modesty, there all fly off,
And leave the faded face no nobler boast
Than well-rang'd, lifeless-features. Ah, *Elfida*,
Should you be doom'd, which happier-fate forbid!
To drag your hours thro' all that nauseous scene
Of pageantry and vice; your purer breast,
True to its virtuous relish, soon would heave
A fervent sigh for innocence and *Harewood*.

Elf. You much mistake me, Virgins; the throng'd
palace

Were undesir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my *Athelwold*. If he were here,
His presence would convert this range of oaks
To stately columns; these gay liv'ried flow'rs
To troops of gallant Ladies; and yon deer

That

That jutt their antlers forth in sportive fray,
 To armed knights at joust or tournament.
 If *Athelwold* dwelt here ; if no ambition
 Could lure his steps from love, and this still forest ;
 If I might never moan his time of absence,
 Longer than that which serv'd him for the chace
 Or of the wolf, or stag ; or when he bore
 The hood-wing'd falcon forth: might these, my Virgins,
 And these alone, be love's short intervals ;
 I should not have one thought remote from *Harewood*.

Cho. And would you wish that *Athelwold* should flight
 The weal of *England*, and on these light toys
 Waste his unvalued hours ? No ; fond *Elfrida* ;
 His active soul is wing'd for nobler flights :
 There let it soar, nor, like the lofty lark,
 That rides the sun-beam warbling, sudden drop
 And roost itself in the low earthy furrow.

Elf. What then, must *England's* welfare hold my Earl
 For ever from these shades ?

Cho. We say not that.
 The youth, who baths in pleasure's limpid stream
 At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his soul
 Nerv'd with recruited strength ; but if too oft
 He swims in sportive mazes thro' the flood,
 It chills his languid virtue. For this cause
 Your Earl forbids, that these enchanting groves,
 And their fair mistress, should possess him wholly.
 He knows he has a country and a king,
 That claim his first attention ; yet be sure,
 'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
 Shall seek a soft *asylum* from those cares,
 Amid th'embow'ring shades that veil *Elfrida*.

Elf. O be that speech prophetic ; may he soon
 Seek these embow'ring shades ! Mean while, my
 friends,

Tune some harmonious lay, whose sprightly notes
 Flow in such happy descant as may speed
 The lazy hours, that now move slowly on
 With dull and flagging pinion. For sweet music

Has

Has got a magic spell to aid their flight,
 And make them skim thro' their diurnal round
 Swift as the swallow circles. Come, ye Virgins,
 Ye have been nurs'd amid yon Cambrian rocks,
 Where yet posterity retains some vein
 Of that old minstrelsy, which whilom breath'd
 Thro' each time-honour'd grove of British oak.
 There, where the spreading consecrated boughs
 Fed the sage mistletoe, the holy Druids
 Lay rapt in moral musings; while the Bards
 Call'd from their wily harps such solemn airs,
 As drew down fancy from the realms of light
 To paint some radiant vision on their minds
 Of high mysterious import. Virgins, wake
 Some strain as sweetly soothing. I, reclin'd
 On yonder neighb'ring bank, will watch his coming.
 [Exit Elfrida.]

O D E.

Cho. The turtle tells her plaintive tale,
 Sequester'd in some shadowy vale;
 The lark in radiant æther flotes,
 And swells his wild extatic notes:
 Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn spray
 The linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
 She haunts no solitary shade,
 She flutters o'er no sun-shine mead,
 No love-born griefs depress her song,
 No raptures lift it loudly high,
 But soft she trills, amid th' aerial throng,
 Smooth simple strains of sob'rest harmony.

Sweet bird! like thine our lay shall flow,
 Nor gaily loud, nor sadly slow;
 For to thy note sedate, and clear,
 CONTENT still lends a list'ning ear.
 Reclin'd this mossy bank along,
 Oft has she heard thy easy song:
 Why hears not now? what fairer grove
 From *Harewood* lures her devious love?

What

What fairer grove than *Harewood* knows,
 More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,
 More shadowy bowers, inviting soft repose.
 More streams slow-wand'ring thro' her winding vales.

Perhaps to some lone cave the rover flies,
 Where lull'd in pious peace the hermit lies.
 For, scorning oft the gorgeous hall,
 Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
 There will the meek-ey'd nymph delight to call,
 And with the solemn Seer high converse hold.

There, Goddess, on the shaggy mound,
 Where trembling torrents roar aroud,
 Where pendant mountains o'er your head
 Stretch their formidable shade;
 You listen, while the holy Seer
 Slowly chaunts his vespers clear;
 Or of his sparing melf partake,
 The fav'ry pulse, the wheeten cake,
 The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.
 Then, rising light, your host you blefs,
 And o'er his faintly temples bland distill
 Seraphic day-dreams of heaven's happiness.

Where'er thou art, enchanting maid,
 Thou soon wilt smile in *Harewood's* shade:
 Soon will thy fairy feet be seen,
 Printing this dew impearled green;
 Soon shall we mark thy gestures meek
 Thy glitt'ring eye, and dimpled cheek,
 What time thou seek'st, with willing haste,
 Thy lov'liest throne, *Elfrida's* breast.
 There seated on that iv'ry shrine,
 Where all the Loves and Graces lye,
 With them your hands shall mutual chaplets twine,
 And weave immortal wreaths of peace and joy.

And

And, hark, completing our prophetic strain,
 The fleet hoof rattles o'er the flinty plain ;
 Now nearer, and now nearer sounds.
 Avaint ! ye vain, delusive fears.
 Hark ! echo tells thro' *Harewood's* amplest bounds,
 That Love, Content, and *Athelwold* appears.

ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Athel. Look ever thus ; with that bright glance of joy
 Thus alway meet my transports. Let these arms
 Thus ever fold me ; and this cheek, that blooms
 With all health's op'ning roses, press my lips,
 Warm as at this blest moment.

Elfri. Athelwold,

I had prepar'd me many a stern rebuke ;
 Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
 Th' averted glance of coldness, which might best
 Greet such a loit'ring lover ; but I find,
 'Twas a vain task ; for this my truant heart
 Forgets each lesson, which resentment taught,
 And in thy sight knows only to be happy.

Athel. My best *Elfrida*—Heav'ns ! it cannot last.
 The giddy height of joy, to which I'm list'd,
 Is as a hanging rock, at whose low foot
 The black and beating surge of infamy
 Rolls ready to receive, and sink my soul.

Elf. So soon to fall into this musing mood——
 I thought, my Lord, you promis'd you would leave
 These cares behind at court. Nay, 'twas the cause
 Assign'd for this my residence at *Harewood*,
 That you might never come to these fond arms,
 But with a breast devoid of public toil,
 And fill'd alone with rapture and *Elfrida*.
 Said you not so ? why then that pensive look,
 That down-cast eye, that settled musing posture ?
 Surely the city's din, and this still forest
 Have lost their difference. Wherefore stay I here ?
 I'll with you to the palace.

Athel. Heav'n forbid !

Elf.

Elf. Nay, my best lord, I mean it but in sport;
 For should you bid me quit these blooming lawns,
 For some bare heath, or drear unpeopled desert;
 Believe me, I would think its wildness Eden,
 If *Atbelwold* with frequent visitation
 Endear'd the savage scene: but yet I fear
 My father.

Atbel. Hah! why him?

Elf. You know his temper;
 How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
 From royal ancestry. I fear me much,
 He will not brook you should conceal me long
 In this lone privacy: no, he will deem it
 Far unbecoming her, whose veins are fill'd
 With the rich stream of his nobility.
 Should it be so, his hot and fiery nature,
 I doubt, will blaze, and do some dreadful outrage.

Atbel. He need not know it, or, if chance he should,
 It matters not, if so this forest life
 Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
 And that it will so seem, I trust that love,
 Which ever yet has met my wayward will
 With pleas'd compliance, and unask'd assent.

Elf. And ever shall: yet blame me not, my Lord,
 If prying womanhood should prompt a wish
 To learn the cause of this your strange commotion,
 Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
 Of quitting *Harewood*.

Atbel. Go to the clear surface
 Of yon unruffled lake, and, bending o'er it,
 There read my answer.

Elf. These are riddles, sir——

Atbel. No; for its glassy and reflecting surface
 Will smile with charms too tempting for a palace.

Elf. Does *Atbelwold* distrust *Elfrida's* faith?

Atbel. No: but he much distrusts *Elfrida's* beauty.

Elf. Away: you trifle.

Atbel.

Athel. Never more in earnest;
I would not for the throne which *Edgar* sits on,
That *Edgar* should behold it.

Elf. What my Lord,
Think you the face, that caught your single heart,
Will make all hearts its captives? vain surmise.
Yet grant it could; the face is yours alone:
Not *Edgar*'s self would dare to seize it from you.
Edgar's a king, and not a tyrant.

Athel. True,
Edgar's a king, a just one; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honour;
Nor do I know what lure can draw his steps
Devious from that straight path, save only one:
That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! *Elfrida*,
Throw but the dazz'ling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burst the slight bondage of the filken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit casually with young *Matilda*'s face
He strait commanded her reluctant mother
To yield her to his arms: nor had she 'scap'd
The violating fervour of his love,
Had not the prudent dame suborn'd her handmaid,
To take the unchast office, and be led
Veil'd in the mask of night, to *Edgar*'s chamber
A counterfeit *Matilda*. As it chanc'd,
The damsel pleas'd the King, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondness; he foregave
The prudent mother, eas'd *Matilda*'s fears,
And led the wanton minstrel to his court.
Where still she shares——

Cho. Behold, Earl *Athelwold*,
A messenger arrives; his speed and aspect
Speak some important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Athel. How now, *Edwin*?

C

Edw.

Edw. The King, my lord, is on his way to *Harewood*.

Atbel. The King!

Edw. His purpose is to pass thro' *Mercia* ;
And in a hasty message, some two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleasure
Was sent you by Lord *Seofrid* ; withal
Commanding your attendance. You being absent,
He straitway turn'd his course thro' this fair forest,
Meaning to chase the stag ; his train is small,
As was his purpose sudden.

Elf. Good my Lord,
Why thus perplex'd ?

Gbo. Heav'n's what a deep despair
Sits on his brow ?

Elf. The notice sure is short ;
But that's a trifle, a small train requires
The smaller preparation : let him come.

Atbel. Yes, let him come : so thou wilt say, *Elfrida*,
When thou hast heard my tale. Yes, let him come,
So wilt thou say, and let thy husband perish.
Yet shall these arms once more embrace thee closely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.
'Tis o'er : in that embrace *Elfrida's* love
Was buried ; and in that embrace, the peace
Of wretched *Atbelwold*.

Elf. What may this be !

Atbel. O *Edwin*, *Edwin*, when surviving malice
Shall prey upon the fame of thy dead master,
Wilt thou not someway strive to check the fiend's
Insatiate fury ? wilt thou see my name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently !

Elf. What means my best——

Atbel. Peace ; not a word of best, or lov'd, or dear :
These are not titles now for thee to use,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire :
We would awhile be private. Nay, return,
Concealment would be vain ; and ye and *Edwin*

Are

Are bound to me. *Albina!* as for you,
I sav'd your father, when his blood was forfeit.

Cbo. Not I, great Earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tye of faith and love
To gen'rous *Athelwold*; to that mild master,
Who never forc'd our service to one act,
But of such liberal sort, as freedom's self
Would smilingly perform.

Athel. It may be so,
But where's the tye, *Elfrida*, that may bind
Thy faith and love?

Elf. The strongest sure, my Lord,
The golden, nuptial tye. Try but its strength.

Athel. I must perforce this instant. Know, *Elfrida*,
Once, on a day of high festivity,
The youthful King, encircled with his nobles,
Crown'd high the spark'ling bowl; and much of love,
Of beauty much the sprightly converse ran.
When, as it well might chance, the brisk Lord *Ardulph*
Made gallant note of *Orgar's* peerless daughter,
And in such phrase as might enflame a breast
More cool than *Edgar's*. Early on the morrow
Th' impatient Monarch gave me swift commission,
To view those charms, of which Lord *Ardulph's* tongue
Had giv'n such warm description: to those words
If my impartial eye gave full assent,
I had his royal mandate on the instant
To hail you Queen of *England*.

Elf. 'Stead of which
You came, and hail'd me wife of *Athelwold*.
Was this the tale I was so taught to fear?
Was this the deed, that known would make me fly
Thy clasping arm, as 'twere the pois'nous adder?
No, let this tender, fond embrace assure thee,
That thy *Elfrida's* love can never die;
Or, if it could, this animating touch
Would soon reawake it into life and rapture.

Athel.

Athel. Dost thou then pardon me? come, injur'd
sovereign,
Plunge deep thy sword of justice in this breast,
And I will die contented.

Elf. Heav'n forbid!
What can be done?

Cho. Indeed, ye constant pair;
'Tis fit ye strive to fly the coming danger.
For safety now sits wav'ring on your love,
Like the light down upon the thistle's beard
Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble Earl,
What feint was us'd to lull the King's impatience?

Athel. Soon as these shades had veil'd my beauteous
bride,

I hasted back to *Edgar*, laugh'd at *Ardulph*,
And talk'd of *Elfrid*, as of vulgar beauties;
Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye;
No breast that sham'd the snow, or cheek the rose.
The sprightly King believ'd me, and forgot her.

Cho. But an alliance, great as *Athelwold's*
With *Orgar's* daughter, soon would blaze abroad,
The theme of popular converse.

Athel. True, it would;
And for that reason, when I last was here,
The King was taught I went to wed *Elfrida*.

Elf. How so, my Lord?

Athel. Thy father, my *Elfrida*,
Has rich possessions: these and these alone,
I made my theme of love; and told the King,
That tho' thy face (pardon the impious falsehood)
Boasted not charms to grace a monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well suit his minister.
I therefore meant to ask thee of thy father,
And (that my want of skill in choice might 'scape
All censure) hide thee close in *Harewood* castle.
Edgar with smiles consented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my disloyalty.

Elf. If so, what danger now?

Athel.

Atbel. Ask'st thou, what danger?

'Sdeath, will that glance not instantly proclaim.
My tenfold treachery?

Elf. He shall not see me.

I'll hide me instant in some secret chamber,
And robe this Virgin in my bridal vestments.

Atbel. Thy love, like balm, runs trick'ling o'er the
wounds

Of my torn bosom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain;
Thou must thyself appear, for *Ardulph* ever
Attends the King, and would detest the fraud.

Elf. If so, yet still I can ensure our safety;
For as you fear my softness of complexion,
I'll stain it with the juice of dusky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree to shrub will yield me. These I'll use,
And form a thousand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which Nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

Atbel. Gentlest, best of Creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs.
And yet how vain? what wond'rous art can steal
The liquid lightnings from those radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair
Of all their nameless graces; say it could,
Yet would that modest, but majestic mien,
That inborn dignity of soul, which breathes
Thro' each angelic gesture, still remain
To seize the heart of *Edgar*. Rest, *Elfrida*,
Rest as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty:
I must submit to my just lot and lose thee.

Elf. Away, my Lord, with these too anxious
scruples:

Fear not my carriage; I will stoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phrase, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peasant awkwardness.

Edw. Ere this my Lord, I think, the King has reach'd
The full midway; 'twere fit you stood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

Atbel.

Athel. Give him meeting, *Edwin!*

Alas, I have no mask to veil my baseness.
When deep contrition shadows all my soul,
I cannot dress my features in light smiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, these eyes
Are not as yet true vassals to my purpose,
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

Elf. You weigh this matter in too nice a balance.
Your crime, my Lord, is but the crime of love:
Thousands like you have fail'd.

Athel. I know, *Elfrida*,
Could love absolve the crime, my soul were pure
As maiden innocence. Yes, I do love thee,
And thou art fair—beyond—But that's my bane;
Thy ev'ry charm adds weight to my offence,
And heaps fresh wrongs upon the best of Masters.
Yes, *Elfrid*, *Edgar* was the best of Masters.
O hide me from the thought in that dear bosom—
Heavens! I must die or keep her.

Elf. Live, or die,
I'm thine alike. Death cannot aught abate,
Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
Be witness of my truth.

Athel. It shall, it shall:
Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful,
Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
Returning confidence has arm'd my soul
For this dread meeting: resting on thy truth
I go—— [Exit *Athelwold*.]

Elf. Go, and thy guardian saint preserve thee,
Show'r blessings vast as would my lavish love,
Had I his power to bless thee!

Cho. Yes, my Sisters,
The silent awe that reigns thro' all your train,
Besits ye well. Let no unhallow'd tongue
Dare to profane her virtue by its praise.
'Tis a bright prodigy, which admiration
Must stand in silent gaze at, and behold
Full-plum'd perfection take its eagle flight.

Above

Above ambition, sov'reignty, and pride ;
Above——

Elf. What could ambition to a heart
So fill'd with love as mine ? if my late act
Had aught of noble and superior grace,
Impute it all to love, to virtuous love,
Than which what passion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action ? but the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove :
There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which stains the pressing finger, with a juice
Of dusky, yellow tinct : its name I know not.
I'll fetch and try it strait. Wait my return.

[*Exit Elfrida,*

CHORUS.

O D E.

Whence does this sudden lustre rise,
That gilds the grove : not like the noontide beam
Which sparkling dances on the trembling stream,
Nor the blue lightning's flash swift-shooting thro' the
skies ;

But such a solemn steddly light,
As o'er the cloudless azure steals,
When *Cynthia* riding on the brow of night,
Stops in their mid career her silver wheels ?

Whence can it rise, but from the sober pow'r
Of CONSTANCY ? She, heav'n-born Queen
Descends, and in this woodbine-vested bower
Fixes her stedfast reign :

Stedfast, as when her high command
Gives to the starry band
Their radiant stations in heav'n's ample plain :
Stedfast, as when around this nether sphere,
She winds the purple year ;
Tells what time the snow-drop cold
Its maiden whiteness may unfold,

When

When the golden harvest bend,
 When the ruddy fruits descend;
 Then bids pale winter wake, to pour
 The pearly hail's translucent show'r,
 To cast his silv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
 And bind in crystal chains the slumb'ring floods.

The soul, which she inspires, has pow'r to climb
 To all the heights sublime
 Of Virtue's tow'ring hill:
 That hill, at whose low foot weak-warbling strays
 The scanty stream of human praise,
 A shallow trickling rill;
 While on the summits hov'ring angels shed,
 From their blest pinions, the nectareous dews
 Of rich immortal fame: from these the Muse
 Oft steals some precious drops, and skilful blends
 'With those the lower fountain lends;
 Then show'rs it all on some high-favor'd head.
 But thou, *Elfrida*, claim'st the genuine dew;
 Thy worth demands it all,
 Pure, and unmixt on thee the sacred drops shall fall.
Elfrida returns with flowers.

ELFRIDA, ORGAR, CHORUS.

Elf. [*looking on the flower.*] 'Tis strange, my Virgins,
 this sweet child of summer,
 Silken and soft, whose breath perfumes the air,
 Whose gay vest paints the morn, should in its bosom
 Hide such pollution? yet 'tis often thus:
 All are not as they seem.
Or. Yet hear me, Lady.
Elf. Be gone, unmanner'd stranger, nor pursue me;
 Hence, from the grove. Know ye this pilgrim, Virgins?
 On my return I met him here.
Gbo. Alas;
 He came at break of day, and told a tale,

That

That mov'd our pity—But I fear me now,
'Twas false; some spy per chance, and may have
heard——

Or. I have; yet not for that are you betray'd.
Fair Excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
I feel a tender interest in your welfare,
Tender as fathers feel.

Elf. As fathers feel;
That well-known voice, and ah! that look——
Or. Elfrida!

Elf. Yes, it is he, it is my father, Virgins.
Support me, or I faint! O wherefore, Sir?——

Or. Take courage, daughter; my parental fondness
Prompted this visit. Thus I came disguis'd,
To learn the cause of my dear child's confinement:
And I have learnt it.

Elf. Then all's lost for ever.

Or. Thou know'st, *Elfrida*, next my house's honour,
Thy peace has ever been my dearest care.
But such an insult——No: I cannot brook it.
So black a fraud! By all my ancestors,
By *Offa's* shade, I will have ample vengeance.

Elf. Alas, I know too well your dreadful purpose.
I knew it at the first. Yes, he must fall.
Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
To ev'ry pitying saint. Celestial Guardians
Of nuptial constancy! O bend from heav'n
Your star-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched woman,
That begs ye save, from a dread father's rage,
Her lord her husband.

Or. Husband! 'Sdeath, what husband?
Is *Athelwold* thy husband? Sooner call
Th' impeached thief true master of the booty
He stole, or murder'd for. Disdain the villain;
And help me to revenge thee.

Cbo. Think, great Earl,
What sanctimonious ties restrain your daughter.
Did she not swear before the hallow'd shrine

Eternal fealty to this her Lord ?
 Yet say, that he deceiv'd her ; shall her truth
 Dare to revenge ? No, Sir, in highest heav'n
 Vengeance 'mid storms and tempests sits enshrined,
 Vested in robes of light'ning, and there sleeps,
 Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's call.
 O ! let not man presume to take unbid
 That dread vicegerency,

Or. Peace, Virgins, peace,
 The saws of Druids, or the chaunt of Bards,
 Have little weight with me, when insults high
 Rouse my just indignation. Hear me, daughter,
 You went to search for flow'rs, to blot your charms
 With their dun hue. Yes, you may search for flow'rs,
 Yet shall they be the loveliest of the spring ;
 Flow'rs, that entangling in your auburn hair,
 Or blushing 'mid the whiteness of your bosom,
 May, to the power of ev'ry native grace,
 Give double life and lustre. Haste, my child,
 Array thyself in thy most gorgeous garb,
 And see each jewel, which my love procur'd thee,
 Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
 The nobler ornament of winning smiles,
 And kind inviting glances.

Elf. Never, never ;
 When this true heart renounces *Athelwold*,
 May equitable heav'n——

Or. Nay, swear not, *Elfrida* ;
 But with a duteous, and attentive ear,
 Listen to my persuasions. Much I wish
 Persuasions might prevail, that not compell'd
 To use a father's just prerogative,
 My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience,
 Follow me, on thy duty.

Elf. Cruel father,
 That duty shall obey you ; I will follow :
 Yet not to quit my love. So mercy shield me,
 As I hold true to *Athelwold* !

[*Exeunt* Orgar and *Elfrida*.
Scnick.]

Semicho. Horror ! horror !

The pen of fate dipt in it's deepest gall,
Perhaps on the ill-omen'd wall,
Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
O ! that our weaker fight
Could read the mystic characters, and spy
What to the unpurg'd, mortal eye,
Is hid in endless night.

Semicho. Suspense ! thou frozen guest, be gone.
The wretch, whose rugged bed
Is lin'd with thorns, more softly rests his head,
Than he who sinks amid the cyncet's down,
If thou, tormenting fiend ! be nigh,
To prompt his starting tear, his ceaseless sigh,
His wish, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

Cho. But hark ! that certainty arrives. Methought
I heard the winding horn. I did not err ;
The King is near at hand. This quick approach
Will sure prevent this proud Earl's cruel purpose.
Yet what of that ? Does her fair form require
The blazon of rich vesture ? Genuine beauty
Nor asks, nor needs it : negligence alone
Is its bright diadem, and artless ease
Its robe of *Tyrian* tincture. Say, my sisters,
Shall we salute this monarch with a hymn
Of festival and joy ! Alas, such joy
Ill suits our trembling hearts, and weeping eyes.
And now 'twere vain ; for see, the King approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

Edg. No, *Athelwold* ; not from a partial blindness,
Or from the mode and guise of courtesy,
Are we thus large in praise ; in our true judgment,
This castle is not more kind Nature's debtor
For this its happy site, than 'tis to thee
For that just symmetry, and modest skill
Which decks the gen'ral structure. Not a frieze,
Or moulded pediment, but in its parts
Claims kindred with the whole ; for ornament

Is-

Is here the offspring of necessity,
Not the vain flourish of unmeaning art.

[*Seeing the Chorus.*]

But ah ! what nobler beauties catch mine eye ?
Thy cattle's beauty, my lov'd *Athelwold*,
Has amplest proof, in having pow'r to hold
Mine eye from such a prospect. Pardon, fair ones ;
To take your graces thus at second note
Was sure uncommon blindness.

Athel. Heav'ns ! they weep.

What may this mean ? Some dread and unseen chance
Has counterwork'd my safety.

Edg. Whence this silence ;

Why are your lovely heads thus bow'd with sadness ?
Beshrew my heart, my Lords, but this is strange.
I know thee, Earl, and know thy gentleness,
More prone t'obey, than lord it o'er the sex ;
Else should I guess this sorrow had its rise,
From some discourteous treatment.

Cho. No, dread Sov'reign ;

He is the noblest, gentlest, best of masters ;
And may your love reward——

ORGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR, CHORUS.

Athel. Death to my hopes !

Org. Yes, villain, start ; but let this vengeful arm
Arrest thy baseness ; would to heav'n its strength
Thus grasping thee, could open thy false breast,
And bare thy heart to the sham'd eye of day.

Edg. Patience, hot man. What art thou ?

Or. I am *Orgar*——

Pardon me, Prince ; that this my honest rage
O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
Yet that's but small ; 'tis not my private wrongs,
But yours, much-injur'd Prince, that call for justice.
Yes, Sir, I here, on a true subject's oath,
Proclaim Earl *Athelwold* a faithless traitor.

Edg. Ha ! what is this ? Renounce the word, old
Earl ;

Thy

Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, sure, to press
 The verge of dotage. *Athelwold!* what *Athelwold*
 A faithless traitor! perish the suspicion.
 Never before did word, or thought, or look,
 Give doubt of his distinguish'd loyalty.
 Dotage alone could frame the accusation.

Org. I do not dote, thank heav'n, my faculties
 Are yet my own, unblemish'd and unhurt.
 Would so my daughter were!

Edg. What is his drift?

Athel. Better, my royal Lord, you mark'd him not;
 The wayward Earl is——

Org. What, audacious villain!
 I will be heard.

Edg. Go to, thou choleric Lord.

Org. When thou hast heard me, King, then call me
 choleric.

Edg. Speak then, and briefly.

Org. Once, my sacred Liege,
 I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
 A father's wish, and lovely as could warm
 A youth to am'rous transports. This, my Lord,
 You learn'd long since from noble *Ardulph's* praises,
 And fired with his description, sent this Earl,
 This faithful Earl, t'invite her to your throne.

Edg. No, *Orgar*, not t'invite her to our throne,
 Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

Org. Yes, he did note it, stamp it for his own.
 But why this parly? Enter, Sir, these gates,
 And let *Elfrida's* features be the book,
 Where you may read the story of his falshood,
 Ev'n at one glance.

Edg. Lead on then, noble Lord.
 We'll follow to the trial. I will humour
 The Earl's hot temper. He has heard, my friend,
 We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that,
 His partial fondness, link'd with his ambition,
 Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, lords.

[*Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.*
 CHORUS,

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

Cho. My Lord, the King is enter'd: stand not thus
In statue-like distress.

Athel. Away, away;

What! can a man that thinks such thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of act, and motion? Speak to me;
Inform me all. What said she, when I left her?
How came her father hither? how did she
Greet his arrival? Say, was she compell'd,
Or did her free and voluntary voice,
Tell all the story? Did she marshal him,
To this his deed of vengeance?

Cho. Dearest Master;

Elfrida told him not: his own deceit
Was his informer. Here the Earl arrived
Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
All like an antient, toil-worn traveller;
And with a tale told in such piteous strain,
Fraught with such sad and moving circumstance,
With woes so well-dissembled; that our softness,
Suffer'd him t'enter this close bow'r for rest,
Which he adapting to his prying purpose,
Thence learnt the secret. This our disobedience,
We own——

Athel. Was my perdition, yet 'tis well;
I blame ye not; it was the work of Fate.
Fate brought him hither, Fate annull'd your faith.
I do not think you purpos'd my destruction;
But yet you have destroy'd me. O *Elfrida*,
And art thou faithful? This my jealous eye
Thought it had mark'd some spect of change upon
thee;

Thought it had found, what might have made thy loss
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not so;
And this thy purity but serves t'augment
The sum of my distractions. Meet me, *Edgar*,
With thy rais'd sword: be merciful and sudden——

[*Exit Athelwold.*

CHORUS.

CHORUS.

• O D E.

Say, will no white-rob'd son of light,
 Swift darting from his heav'nly height,
 Here deign to take his hallow'd stand;
 Here wave his amber locks, unfold
 His pinions cloth'd with downy gold;
 Here smiling stretch his tutelary wand?
 And you, ye host of saints, for ye have known
 Each dreary path in life's perplexing maze,
 Tho' now ye circle yon eternal throne
 With harpings high of inexpressive praise,
 Will not your train descend in radiant state,
 To break with mercy's beam this gathering cloud of
 fate?

'Tis silence all. No son of light
 Darts swiftly from his heav'nly height,
 No train of radiant saints descend.
 "Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,
 "If guilt, if fraud has stain'd your mind,
 "Or saint to hear, or angel to defend."
 So TRUTH proclaims. I hear the sacred sound
 Burst from the centre of her burning throne.
 Where aye she sits with star-wreath'd lustre
 crown'd,
 A bright sun clasps her adamant zone.
 So TRUTH proclaims: her awful voice I hear,
 With many a solemn pause it slowly meets my ear.

"Attend, ye sons of men; attend, and say,"
 Does not enough of my refulgent ray
 Break thro' the veil of your mortality!
 Say, does not reason in this form descry
 Unnumber'd, nameless glories, that surpass
 The angel's floating pomp, the seraph's glowing
 grace?

Shalt

Shall then your earth-born daughters vie
 With me? Shall she, whose brightest eye
 But emulates the diamond's blaze
 Whose cheek but mocks the peaches bloom, |
 Whose breath the hyacinths perfume,
 Whose melting voice the warbling woodlark's lays :
 Shall she be deem'd my rival? Shall a form
 Of elemental drops, of mould'ring clay,
 Vie with these charms imperial? The poor worm
 Shall prove her contest vain. Life's little day
 Shall pass, and she is gone : while I appear,
 Flush'd with the bloom of youth thro' heav'n's eter-
 nal year.

Know, mortals, know ; ere first ye sprung,
 Ere first these orbs in æther hung,
 I shone amid the heav'nly throng.
 These eyes beheld creation's day,
 This voice began the choral lay,
 And taught archangels their triumphant song.
 Pleas'd I survey'd bright Nature's gradual birth,
 Saw infant light with kindling lustre spread,
 Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
 And Ocean heave on his extended bed ;
 Saw the tall pine aspiring pierce the sky,
 The tawny lion stalk, the rapid eagle fly.

Last, man arose, erect in youthful grace,
 Heav'n's hallow'd image stamp'd upon his face,
 And, as he rose, the high behest was giv'n
 " That I alone of all the host of heav'n,
 " Should reign protectress of the godlike youth."
 Thus the Almighty spake : - he spake and call'd me
 TRUTH.

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Athel. Banish me ! No. I'll die. For why should
 life

Remain a lonely lodger in that breast

Which

Which honour leaves untenanted. Vain breath !
 Thou ill can'st fill such vacancy. Be gone.
 This sword shall free——

Cbo. O shame to Fortitude !
 Shame to that manly passion, which inspires
 Its vig'rous warmth, when the bleak blasts of fate
 Would chill the soul. O call the ready Virtue
 Quick to thy aid, for she is ever near thee,
 Is ever prompt to spread her sevenfold shield
 O'er noble breasts.

Athel. And but o'er noble breasts ;
 Not o'er the breast which livid infamy
 Indelibly has spotted. O shame, shame.
 Sword ! rid me of the thought.

Cbo. Forbear, forbear !
 Think what a sea of deep perdition whelms
 The wretch's trembling soul, who launches forth
 Unlicens'd to eternity. Think, think,
 And let the thought restrain thy impious hand.
 The race of man is one vast, marshal'd army
 Summon'd to pass the spacious realms of time ;
 Their leader the Almighty. In that march
 Ah who may quit his post ? when high in air
 The chos'n Archangel rides, whose right hand wields
 Th'imperial standard of heav'n's providence,
 Which dreadly sweeping thro' the vaulted sky
 O'er shadows all creation.

Athel. I was once——
 Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for't)
 A man of such try'd faith, such steady honour,
 As mock'd all doubt and scruple.—What a change !
 Now must that unstain'd, virgin character,
 Be doom'd to gross and hourly prostitution
 Sating the lust of slander ; and my wife,
 My chaste *Elfrida* ! O distraction, no,
 I'll fly to save her.

Edw. Stay, my dearest Master
 You rush on instant death.

E

Athel.

Athel. I mean it, slave,
And would'st thou hinder me?

Edw. Yes, Sir, I hold
'Tis duty to my King, and love to you,
Thus to oppose your entrance.

Athel. What, thou traitor !
Thy pardon, *Edwin*, I forgot myself ;
Forgot, that I stood here a banish'd man,
And that this gate was shut against its master.
And yet this gate leads to my dear *Elfrida*,
Can it be barr'd to me ? O earth, cold earth,
Upon whose breast I cast this load of mis'ry,
Bear it a while ; and you ye aged oaks,
Ye venerable fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching shades
My humble ancestors, oft seen them hie
To your spread umbrage, from yon sultry field,
Their scene of honest labour. Shade, ah ! shade,
The last, the wretchedest of all their race.
I will not long pollute ye, for I mean
To pay beneath your consecrated gloom
A sacrifice to honour, and the ghosts
Of those progenitors, who sternly frown
On me their base descendant.

Edw. See, ye Virgins
How horror shades his brow ; how fixt his eye ;
Heav'n's ! what despair——

Cho. Edwin, 'tis ever thus
With noble minds, if chance they slide to folly ;
Remorse stings deeper, and relentless conscience
Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
Of their severe repentance.

Athel. 'Tis resolv'd,
I'll enter and demand a second audience.
And yet how vain ? ere I can reach his ear,
His ready train will stop me, and with all
The cruel punctuality of office,
So prompt to act 'gainst fallen favourites,

Dismiss

Dismiss me with reproof.—Surely I heard her.
Was't not *Elfrida's* voice? 'Tis she herself.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, ORGAR,
CHORUS.

Elf. No, I will once more clasp him to my bosom.
I will not be with-held. I will o'ertake him,
Will follow him to exile. Hah, my husband!
So quickly found? They thought to tear me from thee,
But we will part no more.

Edg. Take heed, *Elfrida*,
This ill-tim'd fondness may recal the fate
I just now freed him from; who loves like me
Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

Athel. Yes, let me die! Death is my dearest wish.
Quit me, *Elfrida*! leave me to my fate.
'Tis just, 'tis just. Thus to my sov'reign's sword
Freely I bare my breast. Strike, injur'd Prince;
But do not banish me.

Elf. What, *Athelwold*,
Is then the life, on whose dear preservation
Elfrida's peace depends, not worth the saving?
Die then. But ere thy murd'rer strikes the stroke,
Let me inform him, that his act destroys
No single life.

Edg. By heav'n, she loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change——

Elf. No, *Athelwold*,
Thou shalt not die. That pause in royal *Edgar*
Bespeaks calm recollection and weigh'd thought,
And his relenting tongue shall quickly seal.
Thy lib'ral pardon. Come, my Lord, let's kneel;
Now's the blest time; here let us kneel together,
And as these streaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of silent supplication,
Do thou recount——Ah! no, thy modest tongue
Could never tell ev'n half the gallant story.
Be silent then. Let *Edgar's* self reflect,
For well I know his mem'ry writes thy virtues

Upon

Upon its fairest page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy past deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainst this so light a fault.

Edg. So light a fault!

Had he dislodg'd my richest coffer'd treasures,
Dispers'd sedition's poison 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To snatch these regal honours from my brow,
I sooner could have pardon'd.

Atbel. Cease, *Elfrida*.

My doom is just—Yes, royal Sir, I'll go
To banishment. I do deserve to breathe,
Deserve to bear this load of life about me,
For many years to lengthen out my age,
List'ning the hourly knell of curst remembrance,
Whose leaden stroke shall tell to my sad soul
That I was faithful once.

Elf. O flinty *Edgar*,

What! will this penitence not move thee? know
There is a rose-lip'd Seraph sits on high,
Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of Penitence, to catch
Her solemn sighs, to tune them to his harp,
And echo them in harmonies divine
Up to the throne of grace. Ev'n heav'n is won
By penitence, and shall heav'n's substitute,
Shall *Edgar* scorn—

Edg. Cease, cease, thou beauteous pleader!

Ah far too beauteous! Wouldst thou gain thy suit,
Why glows that vermeil lip? why rolls that eye
Bright as the ray of morn? why in each gesture
Such unexpressive graces? why, but because
They're native all, and will not be conceal'd.
Else sure each charm betrays him, and becomes
An advocate, whose silent eloquence
Pleads 'gainst thy voice, and foils its tuneful power.
Traitor! was this the face which thy false tongue
Prophan'd as vulgar? this such common beauty
As the fair eye of Day beheld each hour

In

In ev'ry clime he lighted ? base dissembler,
This instant quit our realm.

Elf. O stay thee, *Edgar*,

And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
As earnest, and distressed a suppliant,
As e'er embrac'd the knees of majesty.
O spare thy country's guardian, *Edgar*, spare
Thy closest, surest friend. Let not one fault,
Cancel his thousand, thousand acts of faith.
Alas ! I fall to vaineft repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties
And leaves me nought but tears.

Edg. Rise, rise, *Elfrida*.

Elf. Shall he then live ?

Edg. He shall, he shall, my Fair.

If so he quit the realm within the space
Our sentence limited.

Elf. O stop not there ;

That sentence will be death to *Athelwold*.
Think, for thou know'st full well his gentle nature,
Can he, support the rigour of this doom ?
Can he, who liv'd but in thy gracious smiles,
Who'd pine, if chance those smiles a single hour
Were dealt him thriftily ; think, can he bear
The infamy of exile ?

Edg. Hear me, *Athelwold*.

Did I not show'r on thy much-favour'd head
My thickest honours, and with gift so ready
As out-run all request ? Did I not hold thee
Still in such open confidence of friendship !
Such love as——

Athel. Sooner stab me than repeat it.

Edg. Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
To taunt, or gall thee. On my soul thy worth
Did o'ertop all those honours, and thy zeal
Kept pace with my best love. Nor till this deed——
But such a deed ! look there, look on that face.
Thou know'st me, *Athelwold*, hast seen me gaze
On a soft yielding fair one, till mine eye

Shot

Shot flames. Perdition seize me, Earl,
If I knew love till now.

Athel. I see it plainly,
Nor say I aught to lessen my offence.
No, here I kneel. Oh! cast but on my mis'ry
One kind forgiving glance; this ready sword
Shall expiate all.

Elf. Ah! will you? must he die?

Edg. No, stay thee, *Athelwold*, and sheath thy sword,
I never yet (save but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my subject. Thou wert still my friend,
And, injur'd as I am, thou still art such:
I do forego the word; to banish thee
Or seal thy death, transcends a friend's just right.

Elf. It does, it does, surpassing goodness. Virgins,
The King will pardon him. Wake each high note
Of praise, and gratitude, teach *Edgar's* name
To *Harewood's* furthest echo. O my Sov'reign!
What words can speak—

Edg. Ah, check these transports, Lady,
Lest, if I see thee thus, my soul forget
Its fair resolve. I'll leave thee on the instant.
Yet first my lips must press this gentle hand,
And breathe one soft sigh of no common fervor.
Now on, my Lords—Fair wonder of thy sex,
Adieu. We'll strait unto our realm of *Mercia*.
Yet first, as was our purpose, thro' this forest,
We'll chace the nimble Roebuck; may the sport
More please us, than we hope. Earl *Athelwold*,
Thou too must join our train. Follow us straight.

Exit Edgar, &c.

Athel. I do, my Liege. *Elfrida*, I have much
For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewell
To tell it all—And yet—

Elf. Ah loiter not,
It may enrage. Farewel. Be sure, take heed
I come not in your talk, avoid ev'n thinking.

Check

Check ev'n the sighs of absence. Haste, my Earl,
Oh haste thee, as thou lov'st thy constant wife.

Exit Athelwold.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Org. Thy constant wife! ah, stain of all thy race,
Degen'rate Girl! Henceforth be *Orgar* deem'd
Of soft, and dove-like temper, who could see
A child of his stoop to such vile abasement,
And yet forbore just wrath; forbore to draw
That blood she had defil'd from her mean veins.
But sure thou art not mine, some Elve or Faye
Did spirit away my babe, and by curst charms
Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me.
Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply.
Edgar has pardon'd him. No, by my earldom
I cannot think of majesty thus meanly.
He'll yet avenge it: what if chance he should not?
That stops not me; I have a heart, an arm,
A sword can do me justice.

Elf. Ah! my Lord.

Are you still merciless? alas, I hop'd——

Org. What could'st thou hope, *Elfrida*? could'st
thou think

I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
Or thy ignoble softness?

Elf. Dearest father,

Frown not thus sternly on me. I would fain
Touch your relenting soul, fain win your heart
To fatherly forgiveness. For thro' life
I've oft had pleasing proof how that forgiveness
Stoop'd to my fond persuasion. But I fear
Persuasion now has left me. My sad thoughts
Are all on wing, all following *Athelwold*,
Like unseen ministring spirits:—Pardon, Sir,
That frown shall check me, I'll not mention him;
I will but plead for my own weakness, plead
For that soft sympathy of soul, which you
Deem base and servile. Base perhaps it might be.

Were

Were I of bolder sex. But I, alas!——
 Ah pardon me, if Nature stamp'd me woman;
 Gave me a heart soft, gentle, prone to pity,
 And very fearful. Fearful, sure with cause
 At this dread hour, when if one hapless word,
 One sigh break forth unbidden, it may wake
 The Monarch's rage—What has my phrenzy said?
 I've wander'd from my meaning. Dearest Virgins,
 My rash tongue more inflames him. O assist me,
 Ye are not thus oppress'd with inward horror:
 Kneel, plead, persuade, convince——

Cho. Alas, my Mistress,

What may a servant's accents do t'appease
 This furious Earl?

Org. Ye well may spare them: Maidens,
 Know my firm soul's resolv'd, and be my heart
 Abject as *Athelwold's*, if I forego
 Its honest resolution. Yes, I'll wait
 The Earl's return, and in his own domain,
 Give him fair combat. I have known the time
 When this good arm had hardihood enough
 For thrice his prowess. What is lost thro' age,
 My just cause shall supply; and he shall fall
 As did the traytor *Oswald*, whose false tongue
 Defam'd me to King *Athelstan*: to the ground
 My sharp lance nail'd the caitiff. [Exit *Orgar*.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

Elf. Think, my Lord,
 Will *Athelwold*, will he enter those lists,
 Where conquest would be parricide? alas,
 He hears me not. Oh, thou obdurate man!
 A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee.
 I will not follow him. No, poor *Elfrida*!
 All thou canst do is here to stand, and weep,
 And feel that thou art wretched.

Cho. Dearest Mistress,
 Restrain this flood of tears, perhaps——

Elf.

Elf. Perhaps!

Ah! mock me not with hopes.

Cho. We do not mean it:

For hope, tho' 'tis pale sorrow's only cordial,
Has yet a dull and opiate quality;
Enfeebling what it lulls. It suits not you,
For, as we fear——

Elf. Do you too fear? alas!

I flatter'd my poor soul that all its fears
Were grief's distemper'd coinage, that my Love
Rais'd causeless apprehensions, and at length
Edgar would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
My joy broke forth too rashly. When they left us,
His safety was not half secur'd; my pleading
Was not half heard; I should have follow'd *Edgar*,
Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
My sorrowing lord.

Cho. We fear that sorrow more

Than *Edgar's* rage. We fear his fallen virtue.
Self-condemnation works most strongly on him,
Ev'n to despondency. Nay, at his pardon,
No joy flush'd on his cheek; we mark'd him well,
He shew'd no sign of welcome. No, he took it
As who should say, "To give me aught but death
"Is a poor boon unwish'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do some impious act——

Elf. What, on his life? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger: this escap'd me.
How mist I this? It suits his courage highly;
Suits too his fix'd remorse.—But yet he will not,
No, *Athelwold*, thou wilt not kill *Elfrida*.

Cho. O may his love preserve him: may these shades
Receive him soon in peace. To this blest end
You sure should strive to calm your father's rage,
At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For know, *Elfrida*,
Beneath the silent gloom of solitude
Tho' Peace can sit and smile; tho' meek Content
Can keep the chearful tenor of her soul,

F.

Ev'n

Ev'n in the loneliest shades ; yet let not Wrath
Approach, let black Revenge keep far aloof
Or soon they flame to madness.

Elf. True my Virgins ;
Attend me then : I'll try each winning art,
(Tho' ill such art becomes me) yet I'll aim it.—
Hark—whence that noise? I heard some hasty footsteps.
Cho. O heav'ns ! 'tis *Edwin*.

ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Elf. Edwin, ah! that look
Bespeaks too well the horror of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

Edw. Alas !——

Elf. Nay, do not pause.
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumstance. I'm ready, *Edwin*,
Ev'n for the worst.

Edw. Then hear that worst, *Elfrida*.
Soon as the stag had left yon westward thicket,
The King dismiss'd his lords, each sev'ral ways,
To their best sport, bidding Earl *Athelwold*,
Lord *Ardulph*, and myself, attend his person.
Thus parted from the rest, the Monarch pierc'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a lawn
Thick set with elm around. Suddenly here
He turn'd his steed; and cry'd, " This place befits
" Our purpose well."

Elf. Purpose ! what purpose, *Edwin* ?

'Twas predetermin'd then, dissembling Tyrant!
How could I trust or hope—

Edw. Yet give me hearing ;
Thus with a grave composure, and calm eye
King *Edgar* spoke. Now hear me, *Athelwold*,
Thy King has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act ;
From each committed sin 'gainst majesty
Thou stand'st full franchis'd ; yet there still remains
Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
As friend to friend, now, *Athelwold*, I call thee

Strait

Strait to defend thy life with thy good sword.
 Nay, answer not; defend it gallantly.
 If thy arm prosper, this my dying tongue
 Shall pardon thee, and bless thee. If thou fall'st,
 Thy parting breath must to my right resign
Elfrida's beauties. At the word, both drew,
 Both fought, but *Athelwold's* was ill-play'd passion.
 He aim'd his falchion at the Monarch's head,
 Only to leave his own brave breast defenceless.
 And the first stroke of *Edgar's* rapid sword
 Pierc'd my dear master's heart. He fell to earth,
 And falling, cry'd, "This wound atones for all."
 "Edgar thus full aveng'd will pardon me,
 "And my true wife with chaste, connubial tears,
 "Embalm my memory." He smil'd, and dy'd.
Elf. Nay, come not round me, Virgins, nor support
 me.

I do not swoon, nor weep. I call not heav'n
 T'avenge my wretchedness. I do not wish
 This Tyrant's hand may wither with cold palsies.
 No, I am very patient. Heav'n is just!
 And, when the measure of his crimes is full,
 Will bare its red right arm, and launce its lightnings:
 Till then, ye elements, rest: and thou, firm earth,
 Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this monster
 Stalk his due time on thine affrighted surface.
 Yes; let him still go on; still execute
 His savage purposes, and daily make
 More widows weep, as I do. Foolish eyes!
 Why flow ye thus unbidden? what have tears
 To do with grief like mine?

Cho. Help, help, my Sisters,
 To bear her to the castle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

Org. As I pass
 Methought I heard a sound of loud lament,
Elfrida, ha!

Elf.

Elf. Is not my father there?

Withhold me not, I'll fall at his dear feet.

O Sir! behold your child thus lowly prostrate;
Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor *Elfrida*,
Your helpless widow'd daughter.

Or. Widow'd daughter!

What, is he slain?

Elf. Inhospitably butcher'd;

The Tyrant's savage self—Stand you thus cool?

Where is the *Saxon* spirit, where the fire

Of *Offa*'s race?—O foolishness of grief!

Alas, I had forgot; had *Edgar* spar'd him,

That sword, to which my madness call'd for vengeance,

Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,

And make the murder parricide. Have I

No friend to do me right?

Or. Thou hast, my child;

I am thy friend, thy father. Trust my care.

Edwin, a word. Retire, my dearest daughter:
Virgins, conduct her in.

Elf. My father, No.

What do you do? I must not be withheld.

I'll go to yon dire grove, and clasp my husband,

My murder'd husband. Why restrain me, Sir?

Can my sad eye dart fire thro' his cold breast,

And light up life anew?

Or. Go in, my child,

And seek Tranquillity.

Elf. And seek Tranquillity!

Ah! who will lead me to her darkling cell?

I know her now, she is death's pale-ey'd sister,

Her mansion is the murky charnel vault,

Whence oft at midnight by the moon's pale gleam

She sees the neigh'ring Sexton with his spade

Upturn the green sward, delving the dank grave

Of some love-stricken maid. Yes, lead me thither.

Gbo. This way, my dearest mistress.

Elf.

Elf. Hold, nay, hold;
 Croud not around me. Let me pause a while.
Albina, thou alone shalt join my mis'ry;
 I've much to utter to thy friendly ear.
 Lead on thou gentle maid; thy single arm
 Shall prop my trembling frame, thy single voice
 Speak peace to my afflictions.

[*Exit with the principal Virgin.*]

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

Or. On your lives,
 Virgins, let no disturbing step approach her.
 Say, *Edwin* (for I guess 'twas you that brought
 These tidings hither) where was royal *Edgar*,
 When late you left him?

Edw. At my master's side,
 Repentant of the stroke.

Or. Comes he not back
 To *Harewood*?

Semicho. Heav'n forbid! *Elfrida's* brain
 Would madden at the sight.

Or. Mistake not, Virgins;
 I did not mean, at this distressful hour,
 The King should see my daughter.

Semicho. No, for pity,
 Do not profane this sabbath of her grief,
 O be her sorrow sacred!

Or. Fear not, Virgins,
 Her peace is my best care, and, to ensure it,
 I'll hast this instant, by young *Edwin's* guidance,
 To find the Monarch. Some four miles from *Hare-*
wood

Stands old Earl *Egbert's* castle, my fast friend.
 With him will I persuade the King to sojourn,
 Till my child's grief abate, that too to speed
 Be it your business, Virgins. Watching ever
 Each happy interval, when your soft tongues
 May hint his praises, till, by practice won,
 She bear their fuller blazon. *Elfrida's* welfare

Requires

Requires this friendly office at your hands ;
 And *Edgar's* virtues bear such genuine lustre
 That Truth itself directs—— [Exit *Orgar*.

Semicho. As Truth directs,
 So only shall we act. This day has shewn
 What dire effects await its violation.
 Strait is the road of Truth, and plain,
 And tho' across the sacred way
 Ten thousand false meanders stray,
 'Tis our's to walk direct,
 And, with sage caution circumspect,
 Pace slowly thro' the solemn scene.

[*The principal Virgin returns.*

Semicho. Has *Orgar* left the grove ?

Semicho. He has, my sister.

Semicho. Then here, and aid *Elfrida's* last resolve,
 Who takes the only way stern fate has left
 To save her plighted faith for ever pure
 To her dead *Athelwold*.

Semicho. Forbid it, Patience ;
 Forbid it, that submissive calm of soul,
 Which teaches meek-ey'd Piety to smile
 Beneath the scourge of heav'n.

Semicho. Ye need not fear it,
 She means not self-destruction. Thanks to heav'n,
 Huge and o'erbearing as her mis'ry is,
 It cannot so oblit'rate from her breast
 The written rule of duty. Her pure soul
 Means, on the instant, to devote itself
 To heav'n and holiness. Assist her strait,
 Lest *Edgar's* presence, and her father's rage,
 Prevent the blest intention. See, she comes.
 Kneel on each side, devoutly kneel around her,
 And breathe some pray'er in high and solemn strains,
 That angels, from their thrones of light, may hear
 And ratify her vow.

ELFRIDA;

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the Virgins divide into two Troops*]

Semicho. Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light ;
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of eternity.

Elf. Hear first, that *Athelwold's* sad widow swears
To rear a hallow'd convent o'er the place
Where stream'd his blood ; there will she weep thro'
life

Immur'd with this chaste throng of Virgins ; there
Each day shall six times hear her full-voic'd choir
Chaunt the slow requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord ;
There too, when midnight lours with awful gloom,
She'll rise observant of the stated call
Of waking grief, bear the dim livid taper
Along the winding isles, and at the altar
Kiss ev'ry pale shrine with her trembling lips,
Press the cold stone with her bent knee, and call
On fainted *Athelwold*.

Semicho. Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light,
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word ;
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of eternity.

Elf. Hear next, that *Athelwold's* sad widow swears
Never to violate the holy vow
She to his truth first plighted ; swears to bear
The sober singleness of widowhood
To her cold grave. If from this chaste resolve
She ev'n in thought should swerve, if gaudy pomp,
Or flatt'ring greatness e'er should tempt one with

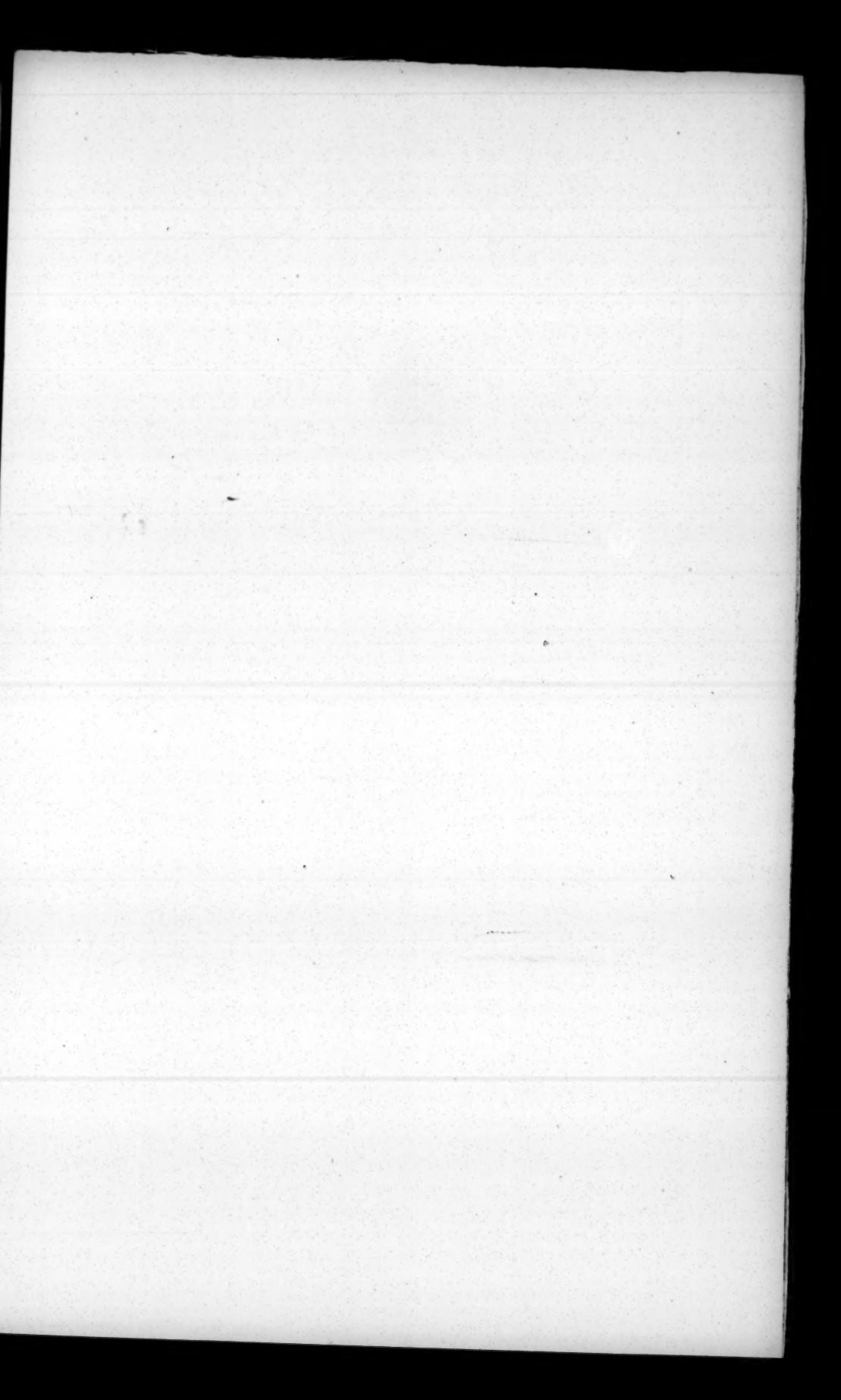
To

To stray beyond this purpose, may that heav'n,
Which hears this vow, punish its violation
As heav'nly justice ought.

Cbo. Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light,
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of eternity.

F I N I S.





To stray beyond this purpose, may that heav'n,
Which hears this vow, punish its violation
As heav'nly justice ought.

Cho. Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light,
And O in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of eternity.

F I N I S.



